

WHAT SHOULD WE TEACH IN OUR POST-SECONDARY SCHOOL?



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This document is written to give new post-secondary schools¹ looking for materials an idea of what they might choose. It does not include information on running a comprehensive curriculum design process², which is something your school should consider once you are established, and your teachers are familiar with the range of needs, resources and the scope of the task. This document provides information on:

1. Deciding the focus of your post-secondary programme.
2. Deciding what subjects to include.
3. Sourcing suitable materials for these subjects.

1. Post-secondary schools and programs are defined as schools that: ■ target post-high school or out of high school students; ■ are non-state; ■ are non-profit; ■ are secular; ■ have regular class intakes.

2. Mote Oo Education's Curriculum Department is able to run in person, online or blended curriculum design workshops.

PART ONE: WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO ACHIEVE?

This is the first question you need to ask. You could also phrase it as: ‘*What are the programme aims?*’ or ‘*What is our mission?*’

If you don’t already have one, start by writing a short paragraph outlining the focus, values and guiding principles of your school. Some examples:

- At the **Online Academic Preparation Centre**, we offer English language training, IT, learning and research skills and a rigorous curriculum focusing on the physical, natural and social sciences. We aim to prepare our graduates for international examinations and future tertiary study.
- The **Central Community Academy** teaches courses on civic education, community development, language studies and social sciences to prepare lifelong learners, enthusiastic teachers and active and engaged citizens.
- The **Empowered Women’s Network** accepts women from marginalised backgrounds aged 16–24 who have not had access to higher education. Through our

life skills and social action curriculum and structured organisational internships, we aim to produce confident, engaged critical thinkers who will assume leadership roles in their communities.

- **Workplace for the Future** comprises a foundational year-long course offering general and specialised training for school-leavers. After a six month intensive course focusing on English and Thai languages, computer and work skills training, students can choose between hospitality, health, tailoring and mechanics streams, with an option of a further years’ placement in an apprenticeship program.

Once you have identified your programme aims, ensure that all aspects of your programme align with these aims or mission. Your subject choices, teaching methodologies and organisational processes should meet these aims. There’s no point in rigid discipline and rote learning if your school wants to produce critical thinkers and empowered actors. A course focusing on community management might not need a class on advanced English grammar.

PART TWO: WHAT SUBJECTS SHOULD WE TEACH?

Deciding what to teach depends on:

- The aims or mission of your programme
- The needs of your students
- The capacities of your teachers
- Other educational options available.

2.1 STUDENT NEEDS

Student needs are best determined by a needs assessment. The most important things to find out are:

- What is the students' prior knowledge?
Are they mostly middle school graduates?
Are they people who have had to leave university? Are they people who have studied in English schools?
- What are the students' aims? Are they trying to access international universities, wanting to work for community-based organisations, planning to teach in local schools?

The distance between a and b is the gap your courses need to cover.





This needs to be realistic. If your students have very little English, they won't pass the GED exam after a one-year programme. If they have had no experience with working on projects, they aren't going to be able to do monitoring and evaluation until they have had exposure to the project management cycle in practice.

Useful tools for finding out students' needs include:

Diagnostic testing. This can tell you what skills and knowledge students have already acquired, and their language levels. These can be conducted as part of the recruitment process or before the start of the program.

Interviews. This can tell you about their prior education experiences, their future plans, and what they consider their strengths and weaknesses.

Surveys. These are useful for getting data from larger numbers of students, and can tell you about overall prior educational experience, aims, interests and practical information like how long they are able to study for, whether they need a day or residential programme, and whether online, face to face or blended programmes will work for them.

2.2. TEACHER CAPACITY

The human resources your school has will determine what subjects at what levels you are able to offer. IELTS preparation courses require teachers with high proficiency in English. Teacher training courses require experienced teachers or trainers. If you want to offer science, civics or cooking courses, someone needs to have the knowledge and skills to teach science, civics or cooking.

Have your teachers had the opportunity to attend general teacher training? Is this available locally or online? If possible, support new teachers to attend pre-service training.

Teachers with some experience may benefit from in-service training on specialisations like social-emotional learning, assessment, lesson planning and activities, evaluation or subject-specific methodology and content. There are a lot of organisations and courses around offering these - encourage your teachers to seek out the courses that are most useful for them.

2.3. OTHER OPTIONS

You don't want to be putting a lot of work into starting something that is available to your students elsewhere. Prospective post-secondary schools must ask the questions:

- What other schools are nearby or online that might work for your students?
- If the available schools are not suitable for your students, why? Are they too expensive, or using languages your students are not proficient in?
- Are they not offering the subjects your students need?
- Are they too far for your students to travel to?

Consider combining resources, so a school that is already set up can teach more subjects, enroll more students or offer scholarships to study there.

If there is an online school already teaching subjects you want to offer, consider using their services for some courses, or even formally partnering with them. There are asynchronous online courses available on a lot of subjects, some international (e.g. [The Khan Academy](#), [Coursera](#)) and some specific to Myanmar (e.g. [SUM](#), [ReMoteOo](#), [British Council Myanmar](#)).

PART THREE: WHAT MATERIALS CAN WE USE?

Once you have decided on what subjects to teach, look for available resources. There is a lot out there, and much of it is free to download. [P-SEF Myanmar](#) maintains a resource library of free downloadable resources developed for the Myanmar context.

3.1 LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

You need to consider what language/s to teach in.

Some post-secondary schools prefer English medium classes, as that leads more easily onto international study. However, there's little point in teaching in a language students don't understand.

There are more materials available for this level in English, as so many countries do higher education in English.

If your students are all fluent Burmese speakers, this might be a practical language choice for many subjects. You might also combine materials in English with explanations in Burmese.

Schools wanting to teach in other languages may need to develop their own materials, or use English or Burmese books explained in

Mon, Karen, Shan, etc. The advantages of this include strengthening of the language being used, and students being able to work on their translation and interpreting skills.

However, **beware the learning burden.**

If students are trying to process new ideas in a new language taught in ways they are not familiar with, they are less likely to retain the key learning points you are focusing on teaching.

For example, if you want your students to be able to design a research project (a new skill), it is best if they can do it using a familiar language and on a familiar topic. If you want your students to know the effects of climate change in rural Karen State (new content), it will be easiest to do this in a familiar language, using familiar teaching methodology. If you want your students to read an essay in English (new language), it is easiest if it is on a familiar topic and in a familiar format.



3.2 WHERE TO FIND RESOURCES BY SUBJECT

An e-library of locally-produced context-appropriate resources, classified by subject, is available from [PSEF Myanmar](#).

3.2.1 ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

Most post-secondary programmes include this subject. The important thing here is not to teach far higher than students' proficiencies - a diagnostic test can give you information as to their language levels. A 2012 study placed the average level of post-secondary entrants at elementary (A2) level in English, although some students will be higher and some lower. If you want to run IELTS or TOEFL prep classes, make sure students have foundational English first.

Unfortunately there are few full textbooks available created for the local context, the as-yet incomplete mid 2000s *Think English* course being the only one we know of.

Commercially available international courses like *Headway* and *New Interchange* are widely available, but often designed for people living in the UK or US, rather than the international English people need in Southeast Asia. More international courses like *Life*, *Global* and *Open Mind* are harder to source outside major cities.

You might decide to add a focus on specific skills - Academic English, English for Specific Purposes (e.g. English for Business or English for Health Care), and as such will need to source appropriate material online or in shops.

There is a lot of international material available online - videos, audio programmes, games and worksheets - that can supplement any course you design or decide to use,

If possible, we recommend developing a library of level-appropriate readers (graded readers), skills books and worksheets, and movies, to give student exposure to the language outside of class hours

3.3.2 LIFE AND LEARNING SKILLS

If your students have mostly experienced a very traditional education, these subjects could be useful to prepare them for further study or work. There are a lot of user-friendly local textbooks and international online resources available.

Subjects/topics you might consider incorporating include personal development/ life skills, learning skills, work skills, leadership, 20th century skills, numeracy, research skills, physical health, mental health, sexual and reproductive health and rights and/or critical thinking,

3.2.3 SOCIAL SCIENCE

This is a very broad subject, which includes disciplines such as economics, environmental studies, development studies, gender studies, politics, history, geography, psychology, civics, peace studies, religious studies, education and public health. Unless your school intends to specialise (or can offer a lot of courses) you'll want to choose which to focus on.

One suggestion is to teach a skills-based foundational course as an introduction looking at data interpretation and analysis, maps and charts, multiple perspectives and evaluation of sources before going on to study specific topics.

3.2.4 MATHS AND SCIENCE

Some schools offer specialisations in these. It can be useful for students to have basic grounding in how the world works. Schools set up to provide foundations in all academic disciplines - for example if they want their students to gain high school equivalency, or want to provide a path to international universities - might also consider including these subjects.

There are not a lot of contextualised materials developed - mathematics and the physical sciences do not tend to vary much around the world - but there are a lot of international textbooks around.

3.2.5 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Schools wanting to train students for community work in local organisations or NGOs include this subject, disciplines including general management, project cycle management, social entrepreneurship, business studies, law, financial planning and accounting, communications and/or media studies.

A lot of the international materials are less useful, as they refer to country-specific laws, situations and practices. There are some locally produced materials available.

3.2.6 IT

Most schools have IT classes, taking students through the basics of computing, the internet and social media, word processing/typing and spreadsheets, usually using Microsoft Office and Google products as they are widely used. Some schools offer higher level courses in layout and graphic design, video creation, using different apps or programming. Courses on all of these are common throughout the region, and there are a lot of locally produced materials available and sold commercially. There are also a lot of instructional videos available online.

If you are planning an online component to your classes, students and staff will need basic IT literacy, but whether this focuses on using a computer or assumes all students will only be using phones depends on the resources you have available.

3.2.7 TEACHER TRAINING

Many of your students are likely to teach at some point. Some will teach as soon as they finish your programme, or in the holidays, whether running short courses in a topic of interest, training colleagues at a community-based organisation, volunteering at a summer English camp for kids, or getting a full-time job in your local education system.

It is very useful if they get some initial training in the theory and practice of teaching. This might be a one week intensive course for graduating students, or regular classes integrated throughout the programme.

There are several [local teacher training guides](#) available, and a lot of online materials and training. Choose one that best matches your students' needs.

3.2.8 VOCATIONAL SUBJECTS

If your students are planning to work after graduating, you may include a vocational element to your course. Vocational subjects can also be useful anyway - everyone will benefit from knowing how to bake, build, sew, repair a phone or motorbike, or design and maintain an organic garden.

Some organisations have training manuals developed locally that they might share or share on request. There are also a lot of training videos online.

3.2.9 OTHER

Various schools also teach sports, music, visual arts, drama, music, philosophy, photography, public speaking, and religious subjects.

3.3 ADAPTING A TEXTBOOK

No textbook will meet the exact needs of your students. Some common issues and solutions:

Problem	Solution
The textbook is too long	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decide on what chapters/sections are important and focus on them Assign students independent reading of sections you consider useful, but not essential
The textbook doesn't have all the topics you want	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add topics from other textbooks or your own ideas Generate new texts by typing key words into https://chat.openai.com/chat
The textbook is written for a different context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Substitute information about (e.g. US) for information about your country Change the names, places, currency etc for ones relevant to your context Skip the parts that are completely irrelevant, or difficult to understand Provide local case studies
The language in the textbook is too difficult for students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Translate or simplify texts as you are teaching them Give students lists of key words/phrases with translations and/or explanations
There are no tasks, or not enough tasks, in the textbook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add exercises to check student understanding Add activities where students apply or analyse information about their own situation, solve problems or create outputs. Add discussions where students express their own ideas about the topics
The textbook doesn't photocopy well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scan and project important pages in class Generate new texts by typing key words from the book into https://chat.openai.com/chat

3.4 OTHER RESOURCES

Try to supply your students with a variety of types of input, both in class and outside of class. Resources might include:

- **Videos.** There is a lot of material on the internet, on every subject, from tutorials on how to do almost anything, to animated cartoons explaining key ideas, to lectures by prominent experts in all fields. Depending on the subject and topic, you can likely find materials in simplified English, Burmese, and other languages.
- **Online asynchronous courses.** There are a lot of [free online courses](#) that students could take to supplement classroom teaching. Most are in unsimplified English although more and more local educators are doing these in Burmese and other languages. Courses with a synchronous component are best done as a separate subject, rather than as a supplement,
- **Audio materials.** Podcasts, radio shows and songs might be useful ways to expose your students to more language and ideas about your subject and topic.
- **Games.** There are a lot of educational games available both online and in physical form, from Scrabble, to quiz games, to card matching games to sophisticated board games.
- **Current events.** One idea is to have students watch/read/listen to local or international news. You could have them report back to the class with their summaries and analysis.
- **Books and magazines.** If you are teaching languages, try to source graded readers at an appropriate level for your learners. Don't fill your library with outdated, complex donated books - they usually just put your learners off reading.

Synchronous and Asynchronous Online Courses

Synchronous Courses

Synchronous courses involve interaction with a teacher. This might include question and answer sessions, discussions, tasks that the teacher marks, final projects. It means students and teachers have to be online at the same time.

Asynchronous Courses

Asynchronous courses don't involve interaction with a teacher, so students can do them at their own time and pace. There usually are only closed questions to check understanding, and if there are assignments, they are not marked by the teacher.

A lot of courses are a blend of synchronous and asynchronous learning.

CONCLUSION

A sound but flexible curriculum, with overall course objectives and detailed topic objectives aligned with learning activities is necessary, but requires experience and commitment to design.

Although best practice recommends having this, it might not be the most useful starting point if you are not yet sure about student needs, staffing and resource availability or school stability.

If necessary, **start off with what you have.** After a few months of running your school, commit to a curriculum development process. This might take the form of a multi-day workshop, or teachers setting aside time each week to work on this. In the meantime, look at curricula of other schools to get an idea of what yours might look like.





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